

***The Mosquito Network
American Military Broadcasting
in the South-West Pacific during
World War Two***

by

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The year is 1944 and the world is at war. In the South-West Pacific, US soldier and radio broadcaster, T/5¹ Hy Averback, presents the *Atabrine Cocktail Hour* programme on the airwaves of the American Expeditionary Station (AES) on Guadalcanal in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. To keep his audience of GI's and other service personnel amused and interested, Averback invents make-believe locations and situations for his show.

“From the fungus-festooned Fern Room, high atop
the elegant Hotel DeGink² in downtown Guadalcanal,
we bring you the dance music of the *Quinine Quartet*”.³

With Harry James' version of *The Flight of the Bumble Bee*⁴ as its musical theme and accompanied by background sound effects of a murmuring crowd, women's laughter and ice tumbling into cocktail glasses, Averback's programme is a daily reminder to troops to take their anti-malarial Atabrine tablets.

The *Atabrine Cocktail Hour* was, in reality, only 15 minutes in duration, but went to air at an appropriate cocktail time (18:00hrs) each day.⁵ Dusk was also the time when malaria-carrying mosquitoes were active. Averback's inventiveness knew no bounds. If the show wasn't coming from the Hotel DeGink, then it was “From the Lizard Lounge in the exclusive Lunga Beach Club,”⁶ or some other concocted location. Captain Spencer Allen, the Station

Manager of AES, Guadalcanal, recalls that the message of the programme was irresistible.

“Occasionally, so help me, a tired and dirty soldier would show up at the studio and ask ‘About this Hotel DeGink- just where is it?’ He didn’t really believe there was such a place, but he wanted to check it out to make sure”.⁷

The American Expeditionary Station on Guadalcanal was just one of a grouping of United States military radio stations providing entertainment programmes and news from home for American service personnel posted to the South-West Pacific. The stations were known, collectively, as the *Mosquito Network*. Others in the chain were located at Munda, New Georgia (British Solomon Islands Protectorate), Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville (New Guinea), Espiritu Santo (Anglo-French Condominium of New Hebrides), Noumea (New Caledonia) and Auckland (New Zealand).

In the cases of Guadalcanal, Munda, Espiritu Santo and Bougainville, the stations were situated within the perimeter of US military bases. The New Caledonia station was originally established in the Red Cross building in Noumea and later moved to a location on the Baie de l’Orphelinat (Orphanage Bay) on the city’s waterfront.⁸ In Auckland, radio station 1ZM of the National

Broadcasting Service (NBS) was temporarily loaned by the authorities to the US military for use as an American Expeditionary Station.⁹

While the *Mosquito Network* serviced the radio entertainment and information needs of military personnel in the South-West Pacific Area of war operations, another AES grouping, known as the *Jungle Network*, operated in New Guinea. A further chain was established in the Central Pacific. The radio stations were not networks in the sense that they shared programmes and news simultaneously. Rather, they were individual medium-wave stations of common parentage. Several instances are recorded of attempted relays of programmes when the AES stations tried to link with their sister stations. However, poor radio reception conditions made the attempts only partially successful. In late-1944, a four-station link-up, with AES, Noumea as key station, was finally achieved.¹⁰

In mid-1941, several months before the 7 Dec. attack on Pearl Harbour, Colonel Jack Harris was Deputy Director of the Radio Branch of the Bureau of Public Relations in the United States Army.

“I well remember a Colonel [R.A.] Bolling of the Army Ground Forces coming to the Munitions Building, which was Army headquarters prior to the building of the Pentagon, and telling us that General [J. Lesley]

McNair, CG of all ground forces, commanded us to get some entertainment to the ground forces manning the Iceland outpost".¹¹

In response, the Radio Branch instituted a shortwave programme, alternating two well-known radio personalities, Ted Husing of CBS and Bill Stern of NBC, giving the latest sports news and events.

"This was titled *Your Grandstand Seat*". It was the first overseas broadcast to troops. Then, we initiated a program, *Command Performance*, which was an all-star Hollywood half hour, which became the premier short-wave show for the troops".¹²

However, some enterprising US soldiers in Alaska took it upon themselves to develop their own infrastructure. Immediately following the Pearl Harbour attack, service personnel in the lonely military base at Kodiak in the Aleutian Islands started work on building their own small radio station. The transmitter was constructed in 17 days and began broadcasts on 24 Dec. 1941.¹³ Although the Armed Forces Radio Service had yet to be officially established, the Kodiak station became, in effect, the first (albeit unauthorized) AFRS outlet. It operated for a year before its existence came to the attention of Army Headquarters in Washington D.C.¹⁴

In early 1942, the US Army, realizing the importance of the psychological welfare of its troops, established the Morale Division of the Army Service Command. The Division's role was to provide broadcasts and entertainment from home to the troops. Jack Harris recalls the early days.

“Thomas H.A Lewis, then husband of Loretta Young¹⁵, was brought in from Hollywood, commissioned a Major and headed the Armed Forces Radio Service”.¹⁶

With Major (later Colonel) Lewis in charge and with one other officer and three civilians administering a newly established office in Los Angeles, the Armed Forces Radio Service began its work.¹⁷ Initially, its key task was to purchase commercial radio programmes for eventual re-broadcast to the troops serving outside mainland USA. At the time, the most popular shows could cost anything up to \$50,000 per programme. However, the AFRS was able to get them for \$65.58 each.¹⁸

By June, 1942, President Roosevelt had established the Office of War Information (OWI). In charge was Elmer Davis, formerly a *New York Times* writer and CBS commentator.¹⁹ However, Major Tom Lewis was concerned about any perceived link between the OWI, which he saw as a Government

information machine, and the radio broadcasting service he was developing for US service personnel.

“It was imperative in my mind that the OWI or any other propaganda organization not be in charge, nor indeed be present, when we were broadcasting to troops. One of the things I was sure of when I was called to Washington to make the master plan for the joint Navy and Army committee was that our troops would hear the same news service that they could hear were they at home and that their families were currently listening to”.²⁰

Within months of the Pearl Harbour attack, American forces were being deployed to the South Pacific to prepare to stem the Japanese military tide. Almost all of South-East Asia had quickly been occupied by Japan and its soldiers were also now based in strength in Rabaul and elsewhere in New Guinea.

General Douglas MacArthur, Allied Supreme Commander in the South-West Pacific, rapidly established his Headquarters in Brisbane, Australia. The US forces under his command began to be deployed, their initial assignments taking them to staging areas, bases and training camps in Australia and New

Zealand. With them went their home-style radio entertainment. As early as July, 1942, it was reported that four of the ZB radio network stations in New Zealand were broadcasting transcriptions of popular US commercial radio shows.²¹

However, it was initially no easy task to get the transcription discs from mainland America to the broadcast sites. Without a system in place, Tom Lewis improvised by simply giving the gramophone recordings to friendly Air Force pilots flying to the South-West Pacific theatre of war. But no matter how hard he tried, he could not get official permission from General MacArthur, or his subordinates, to send the radio show discs by official means. Eventually, he wrote a letter to several Command personnel in the Pacific explaining the problem. The result was as Lewis had envisaged.

“He [General MacArthur] was furious that some amateur young Major was giving orders to ‘his’ radio operations in the South Pacific. The order that we had failed to get was issued very promptly, and we never had any trouble with those shipments of transcriptions again”.²²

By mid-1942, Japanese troops had ventured far down the chain of islands constituting the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) and had identified a potential aircraft landing field on the Lunga plains of Guadalcanal. On

7 Aug. 1942, US Marines landed on Guadalcanal from the sea. Their objective was to capture the airfield, then under construction, and hold it against all odds. A series of fierce battles soon developed as the Japanese military regrouped and attacked in force. Fighting on land continued along ridge lines, in jungles and on beaches. At sea, huge naval actions saw many capital ships sunk or damaged. Within a few months, the Allied forces began to prevail.

As the Allies took the offensive and moved forward through the chain of islands in the BSIP, their military radio equipment, usually operated by the US Signal Corps or specialist Marine or Army units, gave them access to operational information as well as entertainment. California-based AFRS short-wave transmitters pumped out signals able to be clearly heard in the South-West Pacific. Former commercial radio man, Bob Thomas (of WJAG, Norfolk, Nebraska), was, for two and a half years, Officer-in-Charge of the AFRS San Francisco operations.

“We maintained a 13 station network of powerful short-wave stations on the West Coast 24 hours daily on various frequencies and azimuths”.²³

The signals were coming in loud and clear far across the sea, so much so that a request for *Command Performance*, the popular programme initiated by the

Radio Branch of the US Army, was even received from US Marines fighting on New Georgia in the western Solomons. The request was written on a captured Japanese battle flag.²⁴

To further bolster entertainment for the troops, Presto Y-model recorders (consisting of an amplifier and turntable and capable of both playing gramophone recordings and cutting new discs), were sent to Guadalcanal and other operational theatres. By early 1943, portable, low-powered radio transmitters (stored in five suitcases) were also made available. These fully mobile radio broadcast stations moved with the troops and were usually operated by either US Signal Corps personnel or Marine Corps engineers.²⁵ Some of the small studios were reported to be in use on New Georgia and Vella Lavella during the latter part of 1943.²⁶

Meanwhile, back in Los Angeles and Washington D.C., the whole concept of developing American Expeditionary Stations (AES) was taking shape. Short-wave transmissions from a distance were fine, but what was really required was a locally based medium-wave radio presence, thus enabling a greater diversity of news and entertainment programming to be developed and broadcast. The first AES station went to air in Casablanca in Morocco in March, 1943.²⁷ Just over one year later, more than 100 such stations and 200 public address systems were in operation.²⁸

Guadalcanal was, by late-1943, becoming a major US military staging area and rear base in the South-West Pacific. Clearly, such a location would be a prime candidate for an AES station. However, it was not the first of the *Mosquito Network* outlets to be developed, that honour going to New Caledonia.

Tontouta, north of New Caledonia's capital, Noumea, was a major airfield for Allied forces in the Pacific. Noumea also housed extensive hospital facilities and was used by the US military for wounded personnel evacuated from forward operational areas, such as Guadalcanal and New Georgia. Already, a radio transmitter, operated by the Red Cross, and said to have been purchased in Australia,²⁹ was broadcasting news and entertainment to the troops. It was based within the Red Cross building in Noumea, although American service personnel were already involved in managing the station and broadcasting programmes.

On 5 Sept. 1943, the Noumea station was formalized as a military entity when it came under the control of the US Army's Information and Education (I&E) unit. It operated with one kilowatt of power on 975 kilocycles and later took the call-sign WVUS.³⁰ While New Caledonia's radio station was on the air and operational, troops on Guadalcanal in the BSIP would have to wait until March, 1944 before their first radio station (later to be known as WVUQ), was established.

By the month of December, 1943, the Marines had established their own medium-wave radio station at Munda on New Georgia.³¹ Coastwatcher Martin Clemens recalls visiting the island at Christmas and hearing the station on the air. A Solomon Islander thumping bamboo band³² played for Clemens and his US military guests over lunch.

“Their signature tune was *You Are My Sunshine* and this, in fact, their recording, became the opening for the broadcast”.³³

In January, 1944, Major Purnell (‘Mike’) H. Gould (formerly commercial manager of WFBR, Baltimore), became South Pacific Radio Officer of the AFRS with Lieutenant Bob LeMond as one of his assistants and Major Clifford A. Frink as Chief Radio Engineer.³⁴ Based in Noumea, these officers brought together the core of the staff for the future *Mosquito Network* and *Jungle Network* stations. While the Noumea team moved forward with its planning, personnel with backgrounds in the radio industry were being drafted for military service back in the USA.

Rudolph Luukinen (formerly with WSDM, Superior, Wisconsin) and destined to be one of AES, Guadalcanal’s engineers recalls that, upon induction to the armed services, he asked to be assigned to the Signal Corps. This request was granted.

"I received my basic training at Camp Kohler in California and, upon completion, was sent to New York City for familiarisation with high-powered transmitting equipment destined for the European theatre. I was there [in Hicksville, NY] when my 'call' came".³⁵

Another eventual AES, Guadalcanal staff member, George Dvorak, who had worked with radio KFI in Los Angeles before the war, enlisted as a Radio Control Tower Operator in Colorado. He was later called back to Los Angeles to join the team heading for Guadalcanal.³⁶ Allen Botzer, a further Guadalcanal hand, started in radio with KOL and KIRO in Seattle. He went on to KMTR and KHJ in Los Angeles, eventually joining KNX, the CBS outlet in that city. He also enlisted as a Control Tower Operator and was sent to Roswell, New Mexico, later returning to Los Angeles and joining the AFRS crew bound for Guadalcanal.³⁷ Two Texans, radio engineers Rudolph Rubin and Ivan Saddler, also became part of the team.³⁸

Captain Spencer Allen, previously with WGN, Chicago, was destined to head the Guadalcanal group. He recalls that four broadcasting teams (for stations on Bougainville, Guadalcanal, Espiritu Santo and New Caledonia) were given training at AFRS headquarters in Los Angeles.³⁹ Rudy Luukinen remembers that, for the engineers, "our orientation was at the American Television Laboratory on Sunset near Western Avenue".⁴⁰

Under AFRS Special Order Number 10, teams of AFRS graduates were dispersed to the South and South-West Pacific.⁴¹ The Guadalcanal radio team comprised Captain Spencer Allen, Station Manager, Captain Wilford Kennedy, Chief Engineer, and Staff Sergeant George Dvorak, Programme Director. Programme staff were Corporal Allen Botzer, T/5 Hymen Averback and PFC⁴² Richard Sinclair. The technical team was T/5 Rudolph Rubin, PFC Ivan Saddler, PFC Rudolph Luukinen and PFC Steve Johnson.⁴³

On 23 Jan. 1944⁴⁴, the Guadalcanal group boarded the U.S.A.T. *Cape Mears* in San Francisco. After a day staging at Angel Island, the vessel got underway on 24 Jan. 1944. Spencer Allen recalled:

“We lurched along at about 10 knots with a permanent 10 degree list to starboard”.⁴⁵

George Dvorak remembers⁴⁶ that he jokingly called the ship “The Wretch of the Hesperus”⁴⁷. For Allen Botzer, it was also a great new experience.

“This is it and it’s the darndest thing I have ever encountered. I have a bunk right under the ceiling next to the ventilators. Makes it a little on the coolish side right now, but would be fine in hot weather”.⁴⁸

The ship left the US West Coast without escort and headed south-west, crossing the Equator on 8 Feb. 1944. George Dvorak, Hy Averback and Allen Botzer filled their shipboard days as Chaplains' Assistants. At noon each day, they utilized the ship's public address system to run a one hour music and news show for the troops on board.

"The 15 minute newscast at 1230 was with material copied by 'Sparks' [the ship's radio officer]. All in all, the duty was pretty good, compared to some of the other details, such as KP⁴⁹, latrine or garbage".⁵⁰

The respective AFRS contingents carried with them, on board their ships, all the equipment they would need to establish fully-fledged radio stations at their future destinations. Luukinen itemized the AES, Guadalcanal gear as an RCA⁵¹ one kilowatt transmitter, a Rosen studio console, a pair of RCA junior velocity microphones, turntables, a Presto disc-cutter and some short-wave radio receiving equipment.⁵²

The U.S.A.T. *Cape Mears* made landfall at Espiritu Santo in the Anglo-French Condominium of New Hebrides on 11 Feb. 1944 and the various AFRS teams disembarked to go their separate ways.⁵³ Two days later, Captain Spencer Allen's group again boarded a ship, this time for Guadalcanal, finally reaching their destination on 16 Feb.

The American trade magazine *Broadcasting* patriotically heralded their arrival.

“The Guadalcanal station had its beginning when a crew, complete with equipment, was put ashore on a lonely stretch of South Pacific beach. Cpl. Allen Botzer had a .45 thrust into his hand and was told to guard the equipment. The rest of the men were dispatched on a scouting tour to determine what the next move would be”.⁵⁴

Botzer didn't quite see things in the same way. In a letter home, he wrote:

“Of course that business about the .45 isn't true. The rest of the stuff vaguely corresponds to the truth. What really happened is that we sat around on our duffle bags waiting for transportation, very hot, very wondering what happens next. A dull procedure, to say the least. The only thing we had to avoid was having a coconut fall on our noggins”.⁵⁵

Once ashore, Captain Spencer Allen was relieved to find that Army engineers and Signal Corpsmen had constructed a studio building, “the first made of clapboard in the camp”⁵⁶ he recalls, and a smaller transmitter shack about

200 yards away. When the AFRS contingent arrived, it had eight quarts of Scotch whisky for bartering purposes.

“One quart brought us a Navy ‘reefer’- a huge refrigerator. We mounted it next to the studio building, installed some ducts with blower fans and had the only air-conditioned structure on Guadalcanal”.⁵⁷

The studio building was in a huge military encampment about half a mile from Lunga beach and one mile from Henderson Field, the airstrip wrested from the Japanese. The base comprised tents, huts and storage facilities in an area still being used by the Levers company as a commercial coconut plantation, copra being a prime ingredient in soap making. “There was a major east-west road just south of us which we called Highway 50”⁵⁸ Spencer Allen recalls. Coastwatcher Martin Clemens distinctly remembers AES, Guadalcanal as announcing “It was between Fifth Avenue and unimproved ground”.⁵⁹

Continuing the New York theme, the AES staff dubbed their small studio shack in the coconut grove, *Radio City*, an ironic reference to the imposing headquarters of the NBC network in New York City. Everyone had to lend a hand to ensure that the station met its deadline for starting transmissions. “We aren’t only running a radio station- we’re jack of all trades as well”, wrote Allen

Botzer. “We’re putting transite⁶⁰ on the studio walls, building our own shelves and cupboards”.⁶¹

Meanwhile, under the command of the radio station’s Chief Engineer, Captain Wilford Kennedy, Rudy Luukinen and his fellow technicians, Rudolph Rubin, Ivan Saddler and Steve Johnson, were hard at work placing studio equipment in the new station building. They had been given two weeks by Island Command to get everything in place. In reality, the job took about ten days.

One of the more complicated tasks was to install a flat-top (long-wire) antenna between two coconut palms. Luukinen called on his Signal Corps training experience to get him up the trees. He used ‘climber’s hooks’ on his boots. Normally, they were used for scaling telephone poles, but they had the same effect on coconut palms. Carrying the long-wire, he reached the top and, inadvertently, put his left hand into a wasps’ nest.

“I just about fell from a 60 foot coconut tree, but
luckily I grabbed the tree with my other hand and
hung on until I got the wasps off my face and hands”.⁶²

A greater challenge than stringing the aerial was in gaining a reliable power supply. Without constant and stable electricity, AES, Guadalcanal would never go to air. Claimed the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* newspaper:

“Power for the broadcasts comes from a Signal Corps generator driven by a jeep motor burning two gallons of gasoline per hour”.⁶³

The reality was not quite so romantic. Captain Spencer Allen reported that, initially, the station had to rely on the US military’s central power supply. At that stage, the current was coming from a large diesel generator (dubbed ‘The Tojo Power and Light Company’⁶⁴) left behind by the Japanese. However, the fluctuating cycles of the output of the generator played havoc with the AES equipment. Captain Allen knew he had to get something better, especially before AES, Guadalcanal officially went to air.

In the meantime, it was important to begin test transmissions to ensure that the transmitter output matched the capabilities of the antenna and that the studio equipment functioned properly. The evening of 2 March, 1944 is the occasion on which AES, Guadalcanal first broadcast a test signal. It was an historic day as this also marked the inauguration of radio broadcasting in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate.

Allen Botzer also saw it as a momentous occasion and wrote home to his family:

“We’re down at the station this evening running a

two hour test transmission. Right now, it's one of those thrilling moments! I just made a station break in my most well-modulated tones".⁶⁵

The Station Manager, Captain Spencer Allen, had sought assistance from the Navy in checking the strength of the signal from a range of locations. These sites were between 25 miles and 60 miles away from the transmission point near the Lunga River. "At the moment, we're putting out about 800 watts"⁶⁶ he wrote to Major Mike Gould in Noumea.

Already, the station was being deluged with queries as to when it might begin a regular schedule. Spencer Allen, in liaison with South Pacific Radio Command in New Caledonia, had chosen 13 March at 05:30hrs as the date and time when full AES, Guadalcanal transmissions would commence.

As the day of the opening came closer, Captain Allen had to deal with the military bureaucracy over the make-up of the official opening programme. This programme, known as the *Dedicatory Show*, was to be broadcast some ten days after the station started regular transmissions. It was vital that all the 'top brass' were involved in the show and thus able to take some measure of credit for the establishment of such a popular facility as a radio station. However, G-2 (the intelligence arm of the Army) told him that names of individuals could not appear on any programmes broadcast by AES,

Guadalcanal. Spencer Allen remonstrated with them, but he was cautioned that neither general officers nor flag officers could be mentioned by name “nor must their presence here be advertised”.⁶⁷

On the night before the opening broadcast, Captain Allen gathered all the station staff for a last check session. Then, he took out a bottle of Johnny Walker Red Label whisky. Corporal Botzer reported:

“We each had about two drinks to toast the success of the station. Man, that tasted good!”⁶⁸

Regular programming started, as scheduled, at 05:30hrs on 13 March, the *Dedicatory Show* being planned for transmission on 22 March. Daily programmes from AES, Guadalcanal were broadcast from 05:30hrs to 08:05hrs, again from 11:00hrs to 13:00hrs and with evening sessions from 17:00hrs to close-down at 22:00hrs.⁶⁹ The station broadcast on a frequency of 730 kilocycles with a power of one kilowatt. (The frequency was later changed to 690 kilocycles). Originally, it did not use any call letters and just announced itself as AES, Guadalcanal. It also proclaimed that it was part of the *Mosquito Network*.⁷⁰

Credit for creating the *Mosquito Network* name has been attributed to several people. However, the consensus indicates that it was coined by AES,

Guadalcanal's Programme Director, Staff Sergeant George Dvorak. Captain Spencer Allen wishes he had thought of it.

"I would like to take credit [for it], but it belongs to somebody else. But who, I don't remember".⁷¹

When consulted on the matter, almost half a century after AES, Guadalacanal went to air, George Dvorak modestly said that he did not remember the real truth.

"Probably I did [devise the name], I don't know. The big issue at the time was malaria and they had some fancy name for the radio station, which was American Expeditionary Forces, or Services, or whatever it was. And that was a little cumbersome. And it didn't give a personality. So, we just all decided, and probably I was the first one- I don't know- to call it the *Mosquito Network* and it caught on. Everybody liked it. They remembered it. So, we dropped all the rest of it".⁷²

On opening day, things went mostly to plan and a day-to-day routine was soon established. George Dvorak operated the morning shift, with Hy Averbach taking over from him as required. Allen Botzer started at 13:30hrs,

prepared programmes during the afternoon and then announced the evening transmission through until sign-off. On Sunday, all staff operated shifts during a 12-hour working day.⁷³

A *Chicago Sunday Tribune* journalist waxed eloquent in his praise of the opening days of AES, Guadalcanal and its welcome news and entertainment output.

“Up in the hills back of Lunga Ridge, members of an artillery unit pause and move nearer their portable radio. Along the Tenaru River, infantrymen look at each other puzzledly. In a coconut grove, Marine veterans dreaming of home they haven’t seen for months, break into smiles. Guadalcanal at last has its own radio station, real American entertainment- ‘just like home’”.⁷⁴

An Army General visited the new station on opening day. He was accompanied by a Colonel from Special Service Command. When the General asked what was needed to assist the development of the AES, Spencer Allen asked for additional transportation, while Captain Kennedy, his engineering officer, made a specific call for a new generator. He explained that even the coffee pot in the office could fail at any moment because the

power supply was overloaded. The General turned to his accompanying officer:

“Well Colonel, they’ve got to have more power. See that they get it, even if you have to rob somebody else of a bigger generator”.⁷⁵

The next day, Captain Allen could report to Major Gould in Noumea:

“The General I mentioned cast out a few orders and tomorrow, b’God, we get a brand new PE-95-G 10-kilowatt generator”.⁷⁶

“To many, the station is still unbelievable,” wrote the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* correspondent about this newest *Mosquito Network* radio outlet.

“Guadalcanal is still too near the front, still too closely identified with misery and hardship in the minds of weary, mud caked veterans, to have them understand that a real, modern American radio station is broadcasting to them from their own island, thousands of miles from home”.⁷⁷

On 16 March, 1944, the first 'live' studio musical performance was initiated by AES, Guadalcanal. A group of US soldiers from Hawaii, calling themselves the *Royal Hawaiians*, presented a variety of islands songs and tunes.⁷⁸ Next, the radio station decided to venture out into band concerts and, later, 'live' commentaries of boxing matches.

The first outside broadcast of the 'fights' was on 18 March. Spencer Allen was commentator.

"The Saturday night boxing matches were one of our most popular programmes which we broadcast live from an outdoor ring, set up near the Service Club building. For security reasons, the unit names of the boxers could not be broadcast, only their names and rank. The most exciting and good humoured boxers were the Fijians. They loved to fight and seemed impervious to injury. But the only boxing manoeuvre they knew was the 'round-house swing'. It seldom connected, but when it did, the match was over!"⁷⁹

Each AES radio station received a basic library of recorded music from the USA. While this was not the back-bone of the station's programming, it was

the key day-to-day material needed by the programme staff. Allen Botzer noted the contents of the library.

“There’s stuff in it like Andre Kostalanetz and chorus playing and singing *And Russia is Her Name*. Lena Horne, Crosby, Haymes, all the orchestras, Kostalanetz *Holiday for Strings* and a lot of other first-class music”.⁸⁰

The system that Colonel Tom Lewis had put in place in 1942, namely providing recordings of major American network radio shows (from which the commercials had been deleted) to US military radio stations, ensured that AES, Guadalcanal could present top programmes to its audience. The very latest and most popular radio shows from the USA were soon available on the island, the transcriptions being on 16 inch acetate discs.

Apart from the ‘de-commercialised’ (or ‘de-natured’) network transcriptions, the Armed Forces Radio Service in Los Angeles also produced a range of specific programmes tailored to American service personnel overseas. The weekly package contained 42 hours of radio programming. Lieutenant Bob LeMond wrote in the trade magazine, *Broadcasting*, that 28 hours of this programming were ‘de-commercialized’ shows.

“[These] included the Bob Hope show, Bing Crosby’s ‘Music Hall’, Jack Benny, ‘Radio Theatre’, the Boston and NBC Symphonies and many others. The remaining 14 hours are made up of programs which are produced by the Armed Forces Radio Service especially for the men [sic] overseas. These are shows rarely heard by civilian audiences, but to the man [sic] in the service, such names as ‘Command Performance’, ‘Mail Call’, ‘Jubilee’, ‘G.I. Journal’, ‘G.I. Jive’, ‘Sound Off’ and others are ‘tent-hold’ words”.⁸¹

As each American Expeditionary Station (AES) broadcast, on average, 85 hours per week, half of its output came from transcription programmes from the USA, the remainder being produced locally.

Religious programming usually came from the Chapel adjacent to the military cemetery near the Tenaru River on Guadalcanal. Church services, both Catholic and Protestant, were re-broadcast. News broadcasts continued to be primarily relayed ‘live’ from short-wave transmissions received from the West Coast of the USA. The AFRS had its own news service based there and *Mosquito Network* stations would pick-up and carry the signal on the hour. Local news was difficult to collect and broadcast because of security regulations. Even weather forecasts were considered to contain information of a secret nature and were thus not able to be broadcast.⁸²

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The *Dedicatory Show*, or official launch, of AES, Guadalcanal took place on 22

March, 1944.⁸³ The weekly *Command Performance* programme was especially dedicated to AES, Guadalcanal, with messages from such stars as Kate Smith, Randolph Scott, Billy Gilbert and Jimmy Wakely. Although the Guadalcanal radio station had received an advance copy of *Command Performance* on transcription disc, short-wave reception from San Francisco was of such quality on the night of the *Dedicatory Show*, that they simply relayed the programme. However, the transcription disc was synchronised and running on the station's turntables, just in case reception deteriorated and the recording had to be cut in.⁸⁴

Apart from *Command Performance*, AES, Guadalcanal had prepared its own additional programming to celebrate the launch. The senior officer on the island, Vice-Admiral Aubrey Fitch, then Commander of Allied Air Operations in the South-West Pacific (ComAirSoPac), gave a 'live' address. A pre-recorded message had been made on disc by the Naval Commander, Admiral William F. 'Bull' Halsey. However, this speech caused the only problematic moment of the entire *Dedicatory Show*. In a letter the next day to his superiors in Noumea, Captain Spencer Allen reported accordingly.

"During Admiral Halsey's speech, the goddam pickup head jumped a groove and skidded all over the transcription. We got it going again after about a

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ten second pause. We did a dry run on the whole business that afternoon, and everything was jake

then. But it would have to happen on Halsey,
of all people!”⁸⁵

The sixty-five minute *Dedicatory Show* was well received by listeners on the island, with many, according to Spencer Allen, thinking that *Command Performance* from San Francisco had been presented ‘live’.

“They [listeners] were quite impressed that Kate Smith
and Randolph Scott were staying up until 2 a.m. just for us”.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, Allen Botzer had come into the possession of some rye whiskey and brandy to celebrate the official start of AES, Guadalcanal. He wrote:

“We’re going to adjourn as soon as we sign off the air in
a few minutes and toast the formal opening of the place”.⁸⁷

Regular daily programming then set into a routine pattern. Since opening day, the technical facilities of AES, Guadalcanal, both the transmitter and the studio equipment, had been performing well. The station’s Chief Engineer, Captain Wilford Kennedy, wrote to Major Frink, South Pacific Radio Command’s senior engineering officer, in Noumea:

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“We have over 200 hours on the rig now and no
air-time lost. I have a very rigid maintenance

schedule set up that keeps the boys busy”.⁸⁸

Programming was becoming increasingly innovative, with airtime being made available for indigenous Solomon Islanders to be featured on musical programmes. Captain Allen visited one of the camps used by Levers plantation labourers, mainly recruited from the island of Malaita, and talked with their Australian overseer about having some choral groups record programmes.

“We learned that there were two groups of natives who had nothing to do with each other because of their songs. One sang only Anglican hymns- the other, non-secular songs such as ‘Humonderange’ (Home on the Range) and ‘Cummin round the montan’”.⁸⁹

The two groups visited the AES, Guadalcanal studios and made recordings that were broadcast on 12 April. During the studio sessions, Captain Allen tried to explain to the indigenous Solomon Islanders what radio was all about. The Australian overseer translated it into Pidgin⁹⁰ as “Music-him-fella-go-long-way-round-come-out-someplace-else”.⁹¹ In his diary, Spencer Allen noted the occasion.

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“Much laughter when they heard themselves on the loud-speakers. We gave them [the recordings] to play on their gramophone back in the camp. I don’t know if the natives were from Guadalcanal or

Malaita- maybe both. That might be the rivalry because of their song preferences”.⁹²

One of Hy Averback’s popular radio programmes was a *Swap Shop* where he would call for items to be listed for sale or exchange. The items included radios, binoculars, cameras, Air Force sunglasses, records, fountain pens and watches. Japanese battle flags and Samurai swords were much in demand. The only things not allowed to be traded were Service issue items and alcohol. Captain Allen recalls the Navy Seabees⁹³ flooding the programme with fake ‘battle flags’ and ‘genuine’ traditional weapons.

“We discovered that the flags were made of American parachute cloth with a locally painted-on meatball. The war-clubs were beautiful- ebony, the Seabees claimed, with silver and jewelled inlays. The ‘ebony’ turned out to be ordinary pine wood from packing lumber, stained with Shinola shoe polish. The ‘silver’ was polished aluminium, and the ‘jewels’, cats-eyes”.⁹⁴

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News broadcasts were becoming more numerous as AES, Guadalcanal developed. By May, 1944, it was presenting complete news bulletins seven times a day. In addition, two-minute *Headline Highlights* bulletins were presented on the hour. A few months later, news in Pidgin was being broadcast on an occasional basis.⁹⁵ A Fijian medical

Doctor, Dr. Eroni Leauli Taoi,⁹⁶ who was serving on Guadalcanal, visited the station to translate the scripts into Pidgin and present the newscasts on the air.

Apart from locally produced programmes and the regular transcription package, visiting USO⁹⁷ shows often travelled to the island. Ray Milland and three Hollywood actresses visited Guadalcanal in February, 1944. In May, Eric Peabody came with a small group. Other visitors included entertainer Bill Lundigan and, later, Lieutenant Bob Crosby with a troupe of Marines. In August, Bob Hope arrived with his entourage, including showbiz personalities Francis Langford, Jerry Colonna, Tony Romano and a bevy of singers and dancers. Captain Spencer Allen interviewed Bob Hope for AES, Guadalcanal while Allen Botzer recalls that Bob Hope's show, held at the outside theatre, was attended by "to put it mildly, an enthusiastic crowd".⁹⁸ Jack Benny visited the island in the latter part of August, 1944, his concert being broadcast 'live' by AES, Guadalcanal.⁹⁹

As AES, Guadalcanal continued to develop, it was joined by other new stations in the *Mosquito Network*. On 3 April, 1944, AES, Munda, New

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Georgia opened transmissions, having taken-over from the unauthorized station already in operation, with AES, Bougainville following on 15 April and AES, Espiritu Santo on 4 August, 1944.¹⁰⁰

With the war situation changing, so staffing movements within the *Mosquito Network* began to gather speed as some stations closed and programme and technical staff were

transferred to new theatres. One of the first to go from AES, Guadalcanal was T/5 Hy Averbach. In September, 1944, after just over six months with the station, he was transferred to WVUS, Noumea, with plans for onward travel to the AES operation in Auckland, New Zealand. However, the latter move never eventuated.¹⁰¹ Averbach was replaced at AES, Guadalcanal by T/5 Jimmy Lake. At the same time, Corporal Allen Botzer was promoted to Sergeant, while one of the station's key engineering personnel, T/5 Rudolph Luukinen, was transferred to AES, Espiritu Santo.¹⁰²

Management changes were also in the offing. On 18 Sept. 1944, Captain Spencer Allen was promoted Major and transferred to Noumea as Chief of the Armed Forces Radio Service with the title South Pacific Command Radio Officer (SoPacBaCom).¹⁰³ Following his departure, the engineering officer, Captain Wilford Kennedy, assumed responsibilities as Station Manager of AES, Guadalcanal.¹⁰⁴

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One of Kennedy's first actions was to upgrade the aerials of the station. Allen Botzer watched the system being erected.

“We have a new antenna being put in and in order
to clear for the 90 foot poles and the guy wires,
several palm trees had to be pulled down and pushed
over by bulldozers. That's quite a process in itself”.¹⁰⁵

A long-wire was strung between the poles, giving much better broadcast coverage, the upgraded AES, Guadalcanal signal even being noticed by radio listeners as far away as New Zealand.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, the radio station's broadcast frequency changed from 730 kilocycles to 690 kilocycles.¹⁰⁷

Across the board, the AES outlets were improving the quality of their technical output. This resulted in an experiment being conducted to see whether the *Mosquito Network*, a 'network' in name alone until then, could, actually, broadcast programmes simultaneously. The attempt was made in November, 1944. The *New York Times* reported the success of the venture.

“Coming over the transmitters of the American Expeditionary Station at Guadalcanal, they heard the voice of an announcer from ‘AES, Noumea’, which is in New Caledonia. They heard the same voice over

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‘AES, Espiritu Santo’ in the New Hebrides and over ‘AES, Auckland’ in New Zealand. The whole South Pacific couldn’t be ‘island happy’. Last month, the Headquarters of the AFRS in the South Pacific announced they weren’t. The four stations had done the impossible. Without telephone lines or ‘point-to-point’ pick-ups, they had rebroadcast one program picked up from a central transmitter”.¹⁰⁸

On 13 March, 1945, AES, Guadalcanal broadcast its first anniversary programme.¹⁰⁹ The programme was presented ‘live’ from what was called the *Tropicana Theatre*, an outside venue in Lunga Camp. Messages were presented on-air by Major-General Maxwell Murray, Commanding General, Guadalcanal and other dignitaries, with music from the *Foxhole Four* and various other groups and bands.¹¹⁰

The anniversary performance marked the highpoint in the existence of the *Mosquito Network*. A month later, the US Military Command structure in the Pacific changed.¹¹¹ The islands of Bougainville and New Georgia stayed under South-West Pacific Command auspices, while Guadalcanal was absorbed under Pacific Ocean Command, this being a combination of the former South Pacific Command and Central Pacific Command.

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In another sign of the changes then taking place, Major Spencer Allen, as South Pacific Command Radio Officer, decided, in March, 1945, to introduce call letters for all the radio stations within his Command area. He did this because “announcers were more used to the W and K¹¹² call letters of the USA.”¹¹³ The AES station on Guadalcanal became WVUQ and, according to Allen Botzer, first used this new call-sign on 24 May, 1945.¹¹⁴ However, the other stations used their new calls earlier. AES, Munda was assigned WVTJ, AES, Bougainville announced as WVTI (although WSSO was another call given to this station in the early days of its existence, probably because it was originally a Special Service Office operation), while AES,

Espiritu Santo went on the air as WVUR.¹¹⁵

Staff changes increased apace. Both Ivan Saddler and Rudolph Rubin were commissioned as Second Lieutenants and later transferred from Guadalcanal to Noumea.¹¹⁶ On 5 June, 1944, Captain Wilford Kennedy stepped down as Officer-in-Charge and was re-assigned to AES, Espiritu Santo. Sergeant Allen Botzer was, nominally, then in charge of the Guadalcanal station. However, as he noted at the time:

“This station has been in operation so long that there really isn’t much to worry about. There are no salesmen, no accounting department, no money to be made or lost. Just stay on the air really”.¹¹⁷

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In July, 1945 Major Spencer Allen and the majority of the AES, Noumea team began preparations for AFRS stations to be established in newly liberated locations, such as the Philippines. In consequence, the group was airlifted to Manila, gathering equipment and personnel along the way.¹¹⁸ However, history had its own ending in store. On 6 Aug. 1945, the US Army Air Force dropped the world’s first atomic bomb on Hiroshima in Japan. Another, three days later, destroyed the city of Nagasaki.

For Major Spencer Allen, the detonation of the atomic bomb occasioned an opportunity for him to end his Service career. He had reached the Philippines from Noumea when the bomb was dropped. As there was no need for him to continue onto

Japan and take up a role within the occupation forces, he was transferred from Manila to Hawaii and onwards to mainland USA. “I had enough years of service to leave the Army, which I did”.¹¹⁹

Earlier in 1945, the AES had started to close-down its *Mosquito Network* stations as US military forces moved to new operational theatres from rear staging areas. The first to close was the AES station in Auckland which was returned to the local authorities, staff being transferred, in January, 1945, to Noumea where they waited orders for their next assignments. Also in January, AES, Bougainville left the air. By April, 1945 AES, Munda on New Georgia had also closed-down, with some of the staff being re-assigned to AFRS stations in Manila and elsewhere in the Philippines.¹²⁰

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As AFRS crews left the American Expeditionary Stations, operations were often taken-over by other Units, such as the Army Air Force Communications System (AACS)¹²¹ or the US Signals Corps, and kept on the air under local auspices. By July, 1945, AES, Noumea, AES Guadalcanal and AES, Espiritu Santo were the only three AFRS stations still broadcasting using staff who had been with the original teams trained in Los Angeles.¹²² Elsewhere, the AACS kept local radio stations on the air, with their own specialists handling programming and engineering duties.

With the war coming to an end, it was Allen Botzer's turn to leave Guadalcanal, which he did in late August. He was assigned to an AFRS station in the Philippines and handed-over the reins of the Guadalcanal operation to Richard Sinclair.¹²³

However, AES and the *Mosquito Network* had little time to live. Its purpose in the South-West Pacific was almost over. Now, the AFRS would take on a new life broadcasting to US forces based in the Philippines, occupied Japan and elsewhere in north Asia. Meanwhile, a joint military plan was prepared to enable the Army Air Force Communications System (AACS) to completely take-over radio broadcasting from the *Mosquito Network*. The AACS, primarily responsible for air-traffic communications and point-to-point transmissions between the Pacific and the US mainland, would not only have engineering responsibility for the radio stations, but would also provide its own staff for

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programming and announcing duties.¹²⁴

In October, 1945 only AES, Guadalcanal, AES, Noumea and AES, Espiritu Santo were operational as AFRS units. By November, all that had changed. According to the AES, Guadalcanal Station Manager, Corporal Richard Sinclair, AES, Noumea was shut-down by Lieutenant Ivan Saddler and the WVUS transmitter flown by U.S. military air transport to Guadalcanal that month.¹²⁵

At the same time, the AACS established its own radio station, using a separate transmitter, at Tontouta, the huge air base just north of Noumea, rather than in the New Caledonia capital itself. The original WVUS transmitter was reconditioned on Guadalcanal by AES technicians Rubin Taylor and P.V.Johnson, and was then placed at its new transmission site near the AACS centre located on a hill close to Henderson

Field.¹²⁶ While the technicians installed the equipment, Richard Sinclair gave a hand to the incoming AACCS on-air personnel and programmers who would be broadcasting on the former WVUS transmitter.

By this time, AES, Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides had already been handed-over to the AACCS, all the AES staff there having being sent to Guadalcanal.

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On the orders of senior officers, Richard Sinclair was told that AES, Guadalcanal, the last of the *Mosquito Network*, would go off the air on 30 Nov. 1945. Sinclair had a plan for the final evening of transmission. In particular, he decided to use portions of the recordings made by the station since it went to air in March, 1944. He wrote to his friends:

“Will use a bit from George’s [Dvorak] *Native News*,
quite a hunk from your [Botzer] first anniversary show,
and several other cuts we made”.¹²⁷

He then decided to put the final recordings in boxes and send them to the former staff members concerned. “I think that perhaps you would like some of the stuff we have made here,”¹²⁸ he concluded.

When the US Marines had first landed on Guadalcanal on 7 Aug. 1942 they had found little, if any, permanent infrastructure on the island. Later, Guadalcanal became one of

the biggest Allied military bases in the world. The camp constructed between the Lunga River and Henderson Field catered for hundreds of thousands of personnel, with thousands more living on troop transports offshore. Hospitals, cinemas, theatres, wharves were all built on the island. Less than three years later, it was all over. Corporal Richard Sinclair wrote, in November, 1945, to his former colleagues:

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“All the offices, Special Service, I-E [Information and Education] etc. have moved out of the area. The boxing ring is completely knocked down and burned up”.¹²⁹

At the conclusion of AES, Guadalcanal's last transmission on 30 Nov. 1945, Richard Sinclair carried out the orders he had received concerning the disposal of the station's equipment.

“The Signal Corps will box up our old transmitter for shipment to Japan. All the other stuff will go in the junk pile, I guess”.¹³⁰

As Sinclair left the studio on the final day, he took the banner hanging from the microphone and packed it in his kit for home.¹³¹ The banner bore the words *The Mosquito Network*.

After the departure of the AES personnel, transmissions from the AACS-operated

WVUQ continued into the following year. The last reported transmission of WVUQ Guadalcanal is in September, 1946. A listener in New Zealand heard the station on 21 September on 690 kilocycles.¹³² However, when a letter was sent to WVUQ later that month, it was returned by the Post Office bearing the words “Unclaimed. Moved- no address”.¹³³ An era was over.